INTEGRATED MOUNTAIN INITIATIVE

MOUNTAINS CONNECT

October, 2026

Sustainable Mountain Development Summit-XIII



THEMATIC SESSIONS

- Ecological Security & Climate-Resilient Mountains
- Land, Infrastructure & Ecological Carrying Capacity
- Responsible Tourism & Mountain Economy
- Mountain Communities, Livelihoods & Natural Capital
- Science, Governance & Policy for the Mountains



Protecting our mountain ecosystems is about our very existence. We must protect what we still have, retrieve what we have lost, and always with people in at the center of all our planning.

Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI), hosted the 13th Sustainable Mountain Development Summit in collaboration with Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-K) from 12 to 14 October 2026 at Srinagar. The three-day event with the theme "Contouring Sustainable Himalayan Landscapes for Inclusive Viksit Bharat", brought together around 200 participants including policymakers, scientists, administrators, and development professionals.

The Inaugural Session had Shri Omar Abdullah, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir as the Chief Guest along with other dignitaries. A special session on day 2 was graced by Dr. Jitendra Singh, Hon'ble Union Minister for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences. The Valedictory Function was organised with Shri Javed Ahmed Rana, Hon'ble Minister for Forest, Ecology and Environment, J&K, as the Chief Guest.

Shri STS Lepcha, President IMI and Shri PD Rai, Ex President provided the background and SMDS objectives. Dr. R Kotru, GC Member gave the overview of the SMDSXIII. Shri Roshan Rai, Secretary IMI delivered the summary of SMDS outcomes in the valedictory session on the last day.

ADDRESS OF THE CHIEF GUEST

In his address, Hon'ble CM J&K, Shri Omar Abdullah stated strongly that most of us are no longer mindful of the mountains. "Pahad ko Khayal nahi rakhtey". Referring to the recent disaster of Nepal, he mentioned that the issues of climate change in the Himalaya were beyond our control and in the domain of global negotiations, while impacts were being experienced by the mountain people. Climate change has become an everyday experience for the people of the Himalaya - he said, citing examples of changes in snow and rainfall patterns in J&K that led to drought on one hand, and heavy rains that resulted in disasters. He also questioned road construction practices which relied on slope cutting that led to increased landslides. Speaking on the issue of tourism, he highlighted that the tendency to blame only tourists for littering and unsustainable practices needed to be questioned, as even local citizens have to rethink their actions towards sustainability.



Two publications - the SMDSXII report and the Prosperous and Resilient Himalaya report prepared with SYSTEMIQ, were released during the event.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

It gives me great pleasure to address you as the newly elected President of the Integrated Mountain Initiative. I would like to begin by acknowledging the valuable contributions of the outgoing Governing Council and the previous GC members, whose leadership has strengthened IMI's work and partnerships across the Himalayan region.

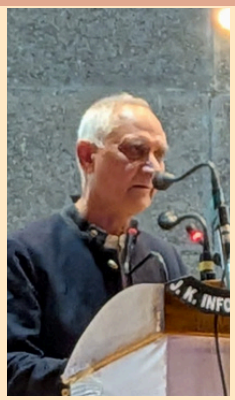
As we begin this new term, our focus will be on translating knowledge and dialogue into meaningful policy and action for resilient and sustainable mountain development. The recently released Prosperous and Resilient Himalayas report, prepared through regional consultations and community engagement, reinforces the immense economic and ecological importance of the Himalayas while highlighting the urgent need for transformative action.

The successful convening of the 13th Sustainable Mountain Development Summit (SMDS XIII) in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, from 12–14 October 2026, reaffirmed IMI's commitment to sustainable mountain development. Hosted by SKUAST-Kashmir under the theme "Contouring Sustainable Himalayan Landscapes with Inclusive 'Viksit Bharat'", the Summit brought together diverse stakeholders to deliberate on key Himalayan challenges and identify policy pathways for inclusive, climate-resilient and ecologically sustainable development. IMI will continue to build on its outcomes by strengthening the link between research, community priorities and policymaking.

The recent disasters across the Himalaya, including the devastating glacial collapse and landslip in Nepal's Rasuwa region, landslides and flash floods in West Sikkim, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are stark reminders of the vulnerability of mountain communities. These events demonstrate that Himalayan challenges do not stop at national or administrative boundaries. They call for stronger regional cooperation, disaster preparedness, climate-resilient infrastructure and development that places ecological and community safety at its core.

IMI will continue to provide a platform for bringing together governments, communities, researchers, practitioners and young people to shape practical solutions for the Indian Himalayan Region. I look forward to working with all IMI members, State Chapters and partners to build a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable Himalayan future.

Regards,
STS Lepcha (President, IMI)



The various technical sessions discussed Ecological Security, Infrastructure and Carrying Capacity, Responsible Tourism and Mountain Livelihoods, as well as issues of Governance and Policy.

IMI members presented during the various thematic sessions bringing in insights for practice and policy. GC member, Amba Jamir from Nagaland spoke on the challenges faced by Himalayan states highlighting the need to build a governance architecture worthy of the mountains and proposed reengineering public finance, and a pan Himalayan council for governance. Roshan Rai presented on the limitations of SWM Rules 2026 and the EPR framework, and pushed for policy amendments.

In the Valedictory Session, Mr. PD Rai presented on IMI's post summit activities and how the summit outcomes would be taken forward in the various states.

A highlight of SMDS 2026 was the discussion on the Sustainable Mountain Development Policy of J & K presented by Prof Nazir A. Ganai, VC, SKUAST-K. He shared that the policy document included issues of tourism, infrastructure, water, waste, forest, livelihoods and knowledge, noting that such a policy would be an inspirational policy for all other IHR states.

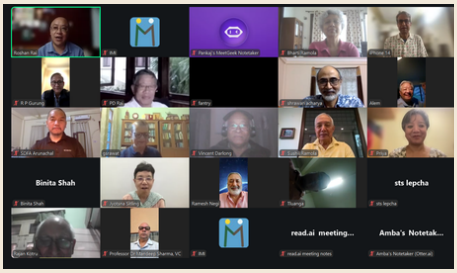




IMI UPDATES

Annual General Meeting

The 13th Annual General Meeting of IMI was held online on 12th September 2026 chaired by Shri Ramesh Negi, President, and with 24 members in attendance. A minute's silence was observed for the Nepal Disaster and the lives lost. Shri Negi welcomed the incoming President Shri STS Lepcha along with the new GC members. Secretary, Shri Roshan Rai provided the action taken report and also presented the brief on IMI activities conducted. Treasurer, Ms. Binita Shah presented the audited financial statements, and all members appreciated the efforts made to keep the finances in order. New members Dr. Anand Sharma, Ms. Jyotsna Sitling and Dr. Shrawan Acharya were introduced and welcomed to IMI.



Key discussion points

- Details of upcoming SMDSXIII to be held at Srinagar presented by Dr. R Kotru.
- State Chapter engagements to be strengthened.
- Work on the SYSTEMIQ report to facilitate investments in the mountains.
- IMI to focus on strategic priorities for the mountains that were relevant for a 3 year vision.



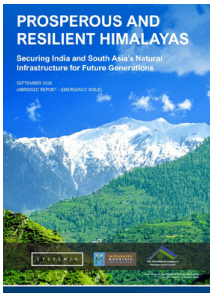
NEW GOVERNING COUNCIL IN PLACE

On 12th September 2026, the new Governing Council of the Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI) formally took charge. The outgoing President Shri Ramesh Negi handed over the leadership to incoming President Shri STS Lepcha and briefed the old and new council on the key work and priorities of the past three years.

Shri Roshan Rai will continue as Secretary and Ms. Binita Shah as Treasurer, while Shri Rezina Mihu will serve as Vice President. Ms. Priyadarshinee Shrestha is the Joint Secretary. The Governing Council includes Dr. GS Rawat, Shri Amba Jamir, Shri Jigmet Takpa, Dr. Rajan Kotru, Dr. John Zothanzama, and Dr. M.P. Sood.

Shri Lepcha thanked the outgoing Council for its contributions and reaffirmed the new Council's commitment to carrying forward IMI's objectives and strengthening collaboration among members and State Chapters. The outgoing Council, Secretariat and election officers, Dr. Satyadeep S. Chhetri and Shri Krishna Singh Rautela, were also appreciated for their contributions.

Prosperous and Resilient Himalayas- Report launch



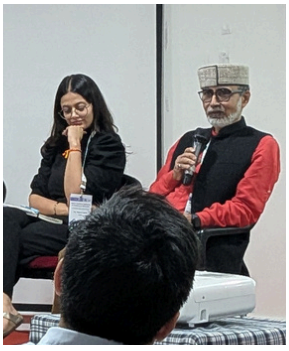
IMI and Systemiq, along with the G.B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment, launched a groundbreaking report on September 19, 2026. Shaped by four regional consultations and series of community conversations, the report sets out key recommendations to build long-term sustainability and resilience across the Himalayas.

The report reveals that Himalayan systems directly underpin 21.5% of India's FY2024 GDP - valued at ₹64.8 lakh crore. The report overview outlines major economic dependencies, intensifying environmental risks, and actionable transitions for sustainable mountain development.

Read Here

Sustainable Sanitation workshop





Dr. Shrawan Acharya and Ms. Priyadarshinee Shrestha presented at the Technical Workshop on Sustainable Sanitation for Sikkim organised by National Institute of Urban Affairs at Gangtok on Sept 8, 2026. They presented case studies of community led sanitation practices and also contributed to the panel on sustainable infrastructure.

Binita Shah at TEDX

Ms. Binita Shah was invited to speak at the TEDX SHRU. She talked on Critical Resource Gap in Uttarakhand Agriculture- Youth. Ms. Shah has played a pivotal role in shaping Uttarakhand's Organic Agriculture Policy in 2002 and led the state's Organic Commodity Board from 2003 to 2015. Her work has helped farmers across multiple states adopt sustainable agricultural practices.



Watch Here

IMI at Himalayan Common Dialogue



The inaugural **Himalaya Commons Dialogue** was organised on 24 September 2026 by BCF, CIEU and Dalberg Advisors, bringing together leaders to discuss pressing Himalayan challenges. Shri Ramesh Negi, former President IMI proposed three key filters for infrastructure projects in the Indian Himalayan Region: human safety, ecological impact, and opportunities for local people and youth. Projects failing these considerations should be reconsidered, he stressed.

Shri Negi also shared his perspectives on the importance of sustainable and responsible approaches to wildlife and ecotourism at the **Wildlife & Eco-Tourism Expo & Conclave 2026 on Aug 17.**

Read more

NMHS updates

JULY

17 July | Sikkim: NMHS, in collaboration with KVK Department, conducted a one-day Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) training. Farmers learned to prepare Jivamrit, Beejamrit, Ghan Jeevamrit, S9 and Biodynamic preparations for natural farming and soil health.

19 July | Niti Valley: Himalayan chive (Faran/Jambu) saplings were distributed to women farmers in Kailashpur village to support livelihood diversification, household income and resilience.

9 July | Spiti Valley: NMHS held a farmer meeting in Kiamo Village on challenges in naked barley cultivation, including nutrient deficiencies, pests, diseases and weeds. Sixteen farmers participated, and S9/CPP inoculum was provided for foliar application and BD compost preparation.

















AUGUST

19 August | Niti Valley: Field monitoring was conducted in Bampa village, focusing on crop growth, soil health and weeding. The team also supported farmers in completing APEDA organic certification and ICS registration.

20 August | North Sikkim: A community meeting at Sangdung introduced the objectives and benefits of a Community Seed Bank, highlighting seed conservation, food security and sustainable farming.

26 August |Niti Valley: Farm equipments like kudals and drantis distributed to local farmers to support land preparation, weeding, and harvesting activities

SEPTEMBER

11–13 September | Niti Valley: NMHS conducted field consultations for establishing a Community Seed Bank, documenting traditional crop varieties, indigenous seed conservation, selection, storage and community management practices.

15–16 September | Spiti Valley: The **Agro-Ecology** team visited Kibber and Chicham to document farmer-wise production, village-level harvest and productivity of traditional naked barley.

23 September | Pin Valley: 22 beneficiary farmers in Kungri village received neem oil, Trichoderma, sickles, hand tools, spray machines and drums to support sustainable farming.

28 September | Niti Valley: NMHS conducted field monitoring across selected villages to assess crop health, growth and overall agricultural conditions. Community meetings also reviewed project progress and the proposed Seed Bank, highlighting concerns around crop vulnerability, harsh weather, seed availability and crop management.

28 September | Kiamo, Spiti Valley: 20 vermibeds and 20 packets of Trichoderma (500 g each) were distributed to 20 farmers to strengthen organic farming. Farmers also reported a renewed increase in earthworm populations after low visibility during June–July.













Partner's corner

SDFU organises consultation



A stakeholder consultation on **Shepherds and the Wool Value Chain in Uttarakhand** was held at Thaur – The **Doon Haat, Dehradun**, by **SDFU** in collaboration with the **NMHS Agro-Ecology Project** and IMI. The consultation addressed challenges in pastoral livelihoods, grazing, sheep health, wool quality, processing and market access, while exploring opportunities in decentralised processing, product development, branding, tourism and digital markets. Participants proposed a Centre of Excellence for Wool and an integrated approach to strengthen shepherd livelihoods, local enterprises and value retention in Uttarakhand.

ZERO WASTE HIMALAYA DAY by DHI and ZWH



On Zero Waste Himalaya Day, Zero Waste Himalaya and the Darjeeling Himalaya Initiative convened schools, community groups, and local partners to turn waste discussions into concrete action. The effort kicked off four collaborative initiatives—Zero Waste Events, Schools, Panchayats, and Darjeeling—inviting stakeholders to co-create practical resources and drive the REFLECT · SWITCH · DEMAND movement for a cleaner, more resilient Himalayan ecosystem.

Book feature in Locavore

The book published by DHI and IMI was featured in Locavore through an article written by Roshan Rai and Priyadarshinee Shrestha. The article is based on the The Himalayan Cleanup data and the need for reclaiming local food spaces to beat plastic pollution.



READ HERE

ECOSS organises International Youth Day / Ridgeline Reflections



As part of International Youth Day 2026, ECOSS organized a session that explored the connections between mountains, biodiversity, music and people's relationship with place. The links between biodiversity, zero waste and sustainable mountain living, as well as the role of ECOSS Sikkim and IMI in addressing challenges faced by mountain communities.The session encouraged youth to reflect on their connection with nature, culture and community.

The Monsoons, the Rains, and the Disasters



PD Rai

The monsoon months of June through September are getting over. It is a season that the Himalaya has always lived with and, increasingly, lives in fear of. A changing climate has made the rains more erratic and more violent everywhere, but the mountains, steep and young and geologically unstable, bear the worst of it.

On 26 August 2026, we watched on our screens as a landslip and the collapse of glacial ice, high in the mountains of Nepal come crashing down hundred metres and that swept through everything in its path downstream in Rasuwa. The latest estimates speak of 1,451 people dead and more than five thousand missing. Numbers of that size tend to numb us, and it is worth pausing to remember that each one was a household, a kitchen, a fields-and-livestock routine that ended in minutes. Closer to home, on 24 September, the entire village of Rimbi in West Sikkim evacuated after a massive landslide, which followed flash floods brought on by days of incessant rain. More than thirty-two houses, four government quarters and the residential colony of a local hydropower project destroyed or swept away. The scale is different, but the story is repeated in valley after valley across the Himalaya, from one monsoon to the next.

I grew up in Gangtok, and the monsoon of my childhood was something we took for granted, even loved. It meant mist filling the valleys, waterfalls appearing on hillsides that were dry a week before, and the smell of wet earth. Landslides happened, of course, and roads cut off for days, but they were part of the rhythm and rarely something that undid a whole settlement.

I do not want to indulge in nostalgia, because memory smooths things, and mountain people have always known the rains could be cruel. But it is hard to escape the feeling that the balance has shifted, that the rains now arrive in heavier bursts on slopes that are less able to hold them. Those of us who cultivate land on these hillsides feel it in a very direct way. On my own land in Sikkim, at about five thousand feet, where the mandarin trees grow among patches of native vegetation, I have seen how much the roots of the old, unruly forest do to keep a slope together, and how quickly a bare or badly cut hillside gives way once the rain finds it. That is what 'development' has done and increasingly doing. In this way precious topsoil is lost.

There is another side of the monsoon, and we should not lose sight of it. These same rains feed our rivers and rivulets, recharge the aquifers on which our springs and villages depend, and bring the whole landscape back to life with a green that must be seen to be believed. Nature bounces back with the onset of the monsoon in all its glory, and without it there would be no water, no harvest, no mountain life as we know it. Like so much else, the monsoon has two faces, and the difficulty of our time is that the gentler one is receding while the harsher one grows more familiar.

This season's disasters reveal the fragility of our mountains—a fragility we have worsened. Roads are cut without adequate drainage or slope-stability measures; hydropower projects and settlements are built in the paths of rivers that return to their old courses; forests are thinned; and a warming climate melts ice and loads the atmosphere with more water than these slopes were formed to withstand. Together, these pressures deepen the vulnerability of young mountains. Development and safety need not be at odds, but they can coexist only when hazards are treated as a core principle of planning rather than an afterthought after disaster strikes. Mountains do not recognise the lines we draw on maps. A glacial collapse in Nepal and a landslide in West Sikkim is part of the same story; national borders matter little when water rushes downhill. Our response must therefore be regional, intergovernmental, drawing lessons from across the Himalaya rather than confined within separate administrative boundaries.

When we founded ECOSS in 2001, the conviction behind it was that conservation and the livelihoods of mountain communities cannot be pulled apart, and that lasting protection of the Himalayan environment would come from people who have a stake in it, rather than from decrees issued at a distance. Having taken over again as its Chair in July 2025, I feel that conviction more sharply than ever, because this season has shown what is at stake if we get it wrong. The work of ECOSS, in restoring and protecting native vegetation, in supporting communities to steward their forests and watersheds, and in building the kind of local knowledge and institutions that make a village more resilient, is more important now than at any time since we began.

So, I would ask all of us, our members at IMI, partners, and readers, to rededicate ourselves to this work in whatever way we can. The rains will keep coming, and we would not want it otherwise. The question before us is whether we can learn to live with the goodness of the rains while doing far more to build our resilience against their fury, and whether we can do so in time.

Meet A member

Dr. Anand Sharma



Dr. Anand Sharma is a new member of IMI, who has joined in 2026.

IMI ASSOCIATION

Dr. Sharma has been associated with IMI since 2024. He has participated in the Sustainable Mountain Development Summits contributing to the sessions on disasters and eary warning systems.

He brings his 30 years of experience related to operational forecasting and early warning experience across the HImalaya.

CURRENT AFFILIATION

Dr. Sharma is the immediate past President of Indian Meteorological Society (2026 - 2028). He is member of the CSIR Monitoring Committee on Himalaya, and Visiting Faculty for Forest Research Institute-Dehradun, LBSNAA -Mussoorie, SKUAST -Srinagar, Uttarakhand Academy Administration and Kumaon University.

CHALLENGES

Extreme weather events / hazards are a common feature of Himalaya. In view of the added pressure of climate change on already existing interannual Natural Climate Variability and rampant land use land cover changes (unplanned development and encroachment) are an ideal recipe for disasters leading to loss of life and livelihood .

IMI FUTURE WORK

In order to cope with weather hazard led challenges, strategies are needed that combine climate action: (Adaptation: strengthen community based effective multi hazard early warning system) and mitigation cut green house gases emission) to build resilience. This along with good governance will go a long way in realising the goal of sustainable Himalaya future.

Mountain matters

Protests against Siang Megadam in Arunachal

Arrests and hunger strike follow protests against the proposed mega-dam in Arunachal Pradesh. Protests have reached Delhi against the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) and activities related to its pre-feasibility report (PFR).

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Nepal, Bhutan seek dedicated Himalayan climate agenda at COP31

The proposal calls for more research, stronger regional cooperation and better support for mountain communities facing climate risks.

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